

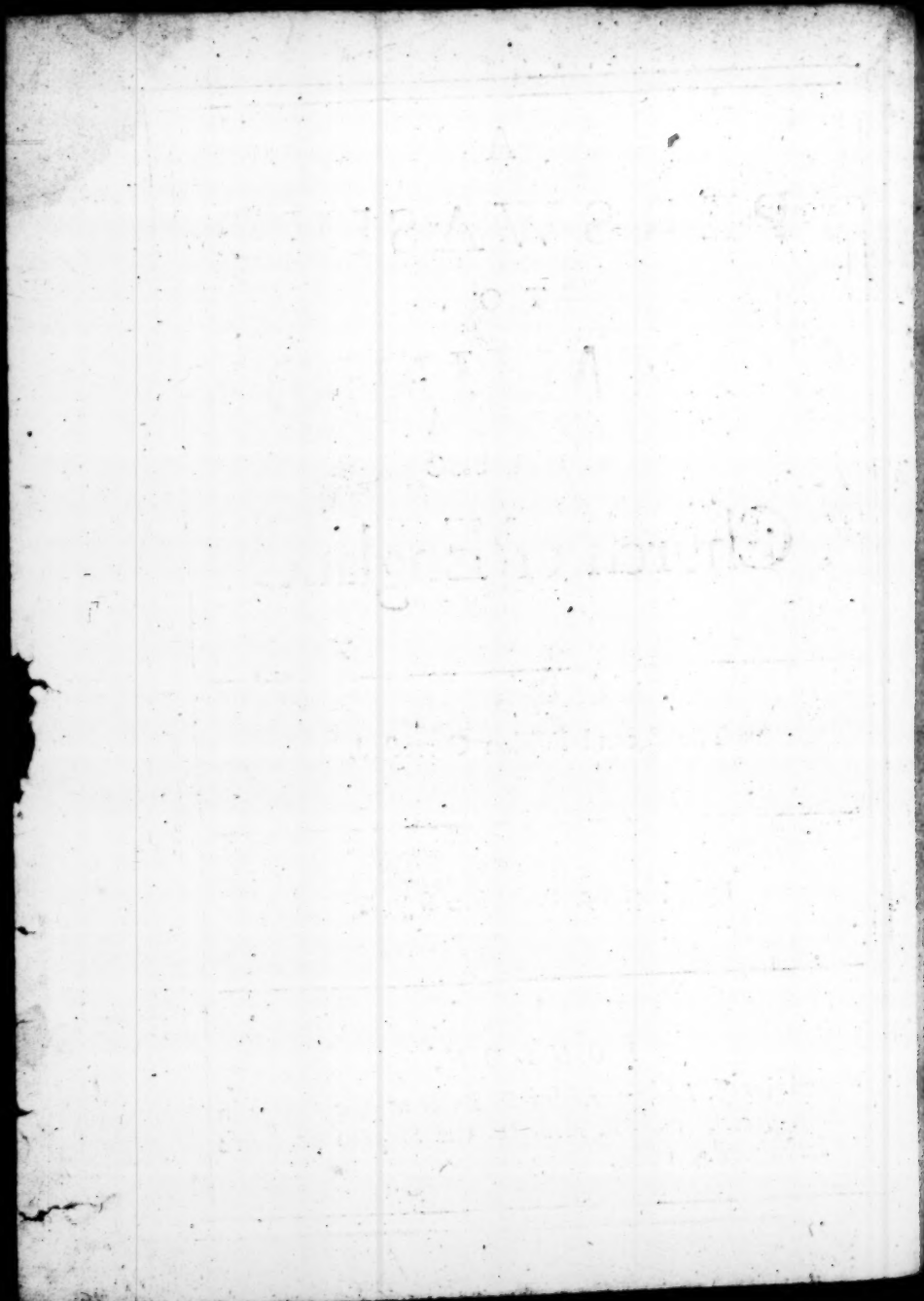
A
PERSWASIVE
TO
COMMUNION
With the
Church of England.

The Second Edition Corrected.

Ephes. 4. 15. Ἀλλήλουις ἐν Ἀγάπῃ.

L O N D O N,

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A Perswasive to
COMMUNION
 With the
CHURCH of ENGLAND.

THere is nothing that does more scandalize and unsettle the Weak, nor tempt the Proud and Licentious to a professed neglect of all Religion, than the many causeless Divisions which do sometimes happen in the Church. And he is no lively Member of that Mystical Body of Christ, that is not sensibly affected with the Fatal Consequences of these things; and does not endeavor, what he Lawfully may, to do something towards the healing of those Wounds which have been made by the extreme Scrupulosity of some; and are still kept Bleeding by the Subtily and cunning Artifice of others. For it is manifest enough, and cannot now be denied, that the *Papists* have always attempted to pull down the Church of *England* by pretended *Protestant* hands; and have made use of the facility of our Dissenting Brethren to bring about their own Designs. I wish the eminent Danger we have been brought into, would prevail with them at last to forbear to Batter and Undermine us, as they have done; when they cannot but see that the Common Enemy is waiting all Opportunities, and stands ready to enter at those Breaches which they are making. They

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might

might condemn the rashness of their own Counsels, and lament it, it may be, when it would be too late, if they should see *Popery* erected upon the ruins of that Church which they themselves had overthrown. We know how restless and industrious the *Romish* Faction has always been ; and the only visible Security we have against the prevailing of it , lies in the firm *Union* of the whole *Protestant* Profession ; and there is nothing wherein there is the least probability that we can ever be all *United*, unless it be the Church of *England*, as it stands by Law established, agreeable to the Rules of the Holy Gospel, consonant to the Doctrine and Practice of the Primitive Christians ; and not only Allowed, but highly Honored by all the Reformed Churches in the World. Here is a Point fixed in which we all may Center ; whereas they that differ from us are not yet, and, it may be, never will be perfectly agreed upon their own New Models of Discipline and Government ; neither can they find one Precept or Example in Scripture or Antiquity, for the Constituting any Church without an *Episcopal* Power presiding over it. And if any Party amongst them could have that *Form* of *Church-Government* confirmed by Law, which they esteem the most Apostolical ; it is manifest from reason and experience, that it would be presently Opposed by all the rest, with no less Violence than ours is ; and instead of putting an end to our Divisions, would most certainly increase them. Therefore though they have all still imposed their several *Forms*, with the greatest Rigor, wherever they have had the Power, or but the Hopes of it, in their hands ; yet that all Sorts of Dissenters may be drawn into the Confederacy for the present, we hear now of nothing so much as the *Mischief* of *Impositions*, and the Natural Right, and great Advantages of *Toleration*. Which is the very thing which the *Romish* Emissaries have always aimed at ; and seems to be one of the subtlest

tiest parts of the *Popish Plot*: As might be made out by divers undeniable Arguments; and appears sufficiently from many of the Letters, Tryals, and Narratives that have been lately published: And it can be no wonder that they should give their Cordial Assistance to such a Design, which, if it should ever pass into an Act, would reward their Diligence with a cheap and easie Victory. For they may plainly foresee, that it would be so far from *Uniting* us, that it would undoubtedly break us in pieces by a Law. Now if *Union* be always necessary, upon the common Obligations of Christianity, it will be much more so in the present Conjuncture; considering the strength and encouragements that may be given to the *Popish* Cause, by the continuance of our Dissensions: And if their be far greater hopes that we may at length, by the blessing of God, be sooner *United* in the way of the Church of *England*, than in any other; then it must needs be the greatest Service that can be done to the *Protestant* Interest, if we could all be perswaded to joyn heartily in the Communion of that Church, that has hitherto been, and still is so great a Defence against the Errors and Superstitions of *Rome*.

It would be an unpardonable Vanity to imagine that these short Papers should be able to effect, what so many Learned and Solid Treatises have not yet done. But I addrest this little Essay only to those that have not time to peruse a larger Volume. I have been encouraged to this Undertaking by the Numbers of those here in *London*, that have seemed formerly to dissent from us, who have lately joyned with us, not only in Prayer, but in the Holy Communion of the Blessed Body and Blood of Christ. And I hope that many more may be invited, and disposed by their good Example, to receive the same Satisfaction that they have found. These that are already come in will not stand in need of any farther Perswasion;

but only that they would continue Constant in that Communion they have now embraced. For if they should leave us again, and return to their *Separate Assemblies*, they would seem by this to condemn themselves. For if it were Lawful for them to Communicate with us once, it must be Lawful for them to do so still; and they will not refuse to submit to Authority in all things that may Lawfully be done. I cannot therefore see how they can avoid being self-condemned, if they should forsake our Communion; for if they judge it Unlawful, they sinned Wilfully when they entred into it; if they think it Lawful, they would then Sin in withdrawing from it; since it is enjoined by that Power which they confess they are bound to obey in Lawful things. If they should say that they once thought it Unlawful, after that they judged it to be Lawful, and now conceive it Unlawful again: This strange unsteadiness in Opinion would look a great deal more like Humor than Judgment. And it might occasion vehement Suspicions in some, not otherwise very Censorious, that this Uncertainty proceeds not from Conscience, but Design; and that all their Compliance was only to serve a present turn; to decline an Ecclesiastical Censure, to keep a beneficial Place, or to be qualified for an Office in some great Corporation. Thus men might be apt enough to suspect; but I am willing to believe any thing rather, than that they, that have always made shew of so great a Tenderness, should be guilty of so much Hypocrisie and Prophaneness together, as to dare even to approach to the Lord's Table, (under great dissatisfaction of mind, it may be) meerly to advance some Secular end. But I hope their Behaviour, for the future, will sufficiently clear them from such an imputation.

I shall therefore apply my self only to those that do still forbear our Communion; and offer something very briefly, which I conceive may be useful for the satisfying their
most

most known and ordinary Doubts; that as we do all profess the same Faith, we may all agree in the same way of Discipline, and Worship; and all become peaceable and orderly Members of the same Church. And for the obtaining this most Excellent end, First, I shall desire them impartially to consider of some things that may incline them to be Peaceably minded, and tend to the removing of the general Prejudices they have unhappily conceived against the Church of *England*: Then I shall endeavor to give what satisfaction I can to the chief *Objections* against us, which they are wont to urge in Defence of the present *Separation*. And lastly, I shall exhort them to a brotherly *Union*, upon such Motives and Arguments as the Gospel suggests, and make for the Credit and Safety of the *Protestant Religion*.

The things that I would commend to their serious Consideration, which may serve to dispose them to *Peace*, and to remove the *Prejudices* they have taken up, are such as these. In the first place, they should be very careful that it be not any *sinister* end, or corrupt *Passion*, that did either engage them in the *Separation* at the beginning, or provokes them now to continue in it. I do not mention this, because I know any one of our Dissenting Brethren to be guilty of it; but because it must be confessed, that mens minds are too often influenced by their carnal *Interests* and *Affections*. These will be always mixing themselves in all their Consultations; these do commonly blind and pervert their Judgments, and lead them into ten thousand Errours. These are the occasion, that Fancy sometimes passes for Conscience; that Melancholy Fumes are admired for Divine Inspirations; and that the overflowing of our Gall is looked upon as pure Zeal. These and the like are very dangerous and usual Mistakes, that do frequently proceed from the prevalency of our *Passions*. If therefore we do divide from a Church, it will most highly

highly concern us to be very Cautious, that we be not acted by any such Principle. For if we hope to Gain, and grow Rich by our Departure ; if we are Ashamed, or Scorn to retract the Opinions we have once Professed ; if we imagine we have more *Light* than the first Reformers, when indeed we are very Ignorant ; if we cannot endure to be Opposed in any thing ; if we Murmur and Repine at our Governors, when they require our Obedience where we are unwilling to pay it ; these are signs that our *Affections* are turbulent and unruly ; and while we are thus disposed, we can never be assured but that Covetousness, Pride, and Impatience, might be the greatest Motives that induced us to make a *Separation*, and the strongest Arguments that we have to maintain it. But I cannot charge our Dissenting Brethren with these things ; I believe that many of them may be Upright and Sincere in their Intentions. But because they are all in the same estate of Degeneracy and Corruption which others are, I would intreat them to be very careful that they be never led away by these, or the like temptations ; but that they would always labor to preserve those holy Dispositions of Integrity, Meekness, Humility and Condescension, which are the best Preparatives to the receiving of the Truth in the Love of it.

After they have thus freed their minds from all irregular Passions and Designs, it would conduce exceedingly to the P E A C E of the Church, if they would be sure to express their greatest Care and Concern in the more *Weighty* and *Substantial* things of Religion. This would prevent many of the Quarrels that do often arise in matters but of small Importance. If real Holiness and Piety be the thing that we aim at, then when we may be secured of this, we should not be so very forward to enter upon fierce and endless Disputes, about the external Modes and Circumstances of Worship. If I may serve God there in
Spirit

Spirit and in Truth, why should a Gown, or a Cloak, or a Surplice fright me from the Church, when either of these is enjoined by my Superiors? If I may be instructed in the way of Salvation and eternal Happiness, why should I forsake the Publick Assemblies, because I am not allowed to joyn my self to what Congregation I please? And had not an immediate hand in the choice of my Pastor? When our hearts are bent upon the great things of Religion, we shall see but little Reason to be Contentious about matters of lesser Consequence; a few indifferent Rites will scarce be able to tempt us to break off Communion with that Church, with which we are at perfect Agreement in all Fundamental and Necessary points.

The next thing, that may tend to the promoting our Union, is, the Consideration of the heinous Nature and Guilt of *Schism*; which is nothing else but the *Separating* our selves from a True Church without any just Occasion given. The want of due apprehensions of the *Sinfulness* of this, seems to be the main Cause of our present Divisions. Men are not generally sufficiently sensible how much they do Oppose that Spirit of *Peace*, and Brotherly Love, which should diffuse it self through the whole Body of Christian People, when they suppose every slender Pretence enough to justify their departing from us, and setting up a Church against a Church. They think it a matter almost Indifferent, and that they are left to their own Choice to joyn with that Society of Christians, they themselves please. Which giddy Principle; if it should prevail, would certainly throw us into an absolute Confusion, and introduce all the Errors and Mischiefs that can be imagined. But our blessed Lord founded but One Universal Church; and when he was ready to be Crucified for us, and *Prayed not for the Apostles alone, but for them* John 17. 20, *also that should believe in him through their word; one of* 21. the last Petitions which he then put up, amongst divers others

others to the same purpose, was, *That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the World may believe that thou hast sent me.* This it is plain was to be a visible *Unity*, that might be taken notice of in the World, and so become an inducement to move men to the embracing of the Christian Faith. Therefore as we would avoid the hardening of men in Atheism and Infidelity, and making the Prayer of our dying Saviour, as much as in us lies, wholly ineffectual; we should be exceeding Cautious, that we do not wilfully *Divide* his holy Catholick Church. We are often warned of this; and how many Arguments does St. Paul heap together to persuade us to keep the *Unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace? One Body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your Calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all.* And how pathetically does the same Apostle exhort us again to the same thing, by all the mutual endearments that Christianity affords; *If there be therefore any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies; fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.* These vehement Exhortations to Peace and Concord, do strictly oblige us to hold Communion with that Church, which requires nothing that is Unlawful of us. The Church of Rome will not admit us, unless we profess a belief of Transubstantiation, and Purgatory, and a certain kind of Infallibility, no body knows where; unless we will Worship the Host, and Saints, and Images, and do many other things directly repugnant to the Word of God: We cannot therefore Communicate with her, unless we should partake of her gross and superstitious Errours. But the Church of England does not exact any thing from us, that God has forbidden; therefore we may Communicate with her without

Eph. 4. 3, 4,
5, 6.

Phil. 2. 1, 2.

without Sin; and if we may, it must be a Sin in us if we do not do it. Certain it is that every causels *Separation* is a very great one; so great, that some of the Antients have thought it is not to be expiated by the Blood of Martyrdom; and I know no cause sufficient to defend our leaving a Communion, but a necessity of being involved in *Sin*, if we should remain in it. Now since it must be confessed, that *Schism* is a very grievous *Sin*; we had need be well assured that we have just occasion for it, before we withdraw from the Communion of a Church; and if we have rashly withdrawn, we are bound to return without delay.

Then we may consider farther, that all Christians are obliged to endeavour, as much as they can, to avoid all differences of Opinion that may occasion Quarrels and Contentments among them. This will appear from that passionate Intreaty and Admonition which the holy Apostle gave the *Corinthians*, when they were in danger of being rent into several Factions, upon misunderstandings and emulations not much unlike unto ours. Now I beseech you, 1 Cor. I. 10. Brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no Divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joyned together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. Such an Universal agreement and harmony in the Church is very desirable, and every one is bound to promote it. And the first step, that can be made towards this happy *Concord* in Opinion and Affections, is to dispose our minds to a calm and teachable Temper; to be always ready to acknowledge the force of an Argument, though it contradict our former Perswasions never so much; to be grieved at the Animosities, and uncharitable Contentions, which a diversity of Judgment is wont to produce; to follow after the things Rom. 14. 19. which make for Peace; to be desirous to see an end of these Unchristian Divisions, and glad of every Opportunity

that may bring us nearer to one another, and think we have gained a glorious Victory, when we have overcome any mistake that kept us at a distance from our Brethren. This is a generous and truly Christian disposition, and that which has an immediate tendency towards the reconciling all manner of Differences. On the other side, there can be little hopes that men should ever agree, when they seem resolved to maintain the point in Controversie, whatever it is; when they do not study to be Satisfied, but to cherish their Scruples, and hunt about for New ones, when their old Objections are fully answered. This is a most perverse and untractable Humour, which takes away all possibility of a good Accord. For while either of the Dissenting Parties is thus unwilling to be Convinced, and searches after Exceptions, there will never be wanting some Cavil or other that must be sure to serve them to perpetuate the Dispute. But 'tis a shrewd Sign we esteem our Cause little better than Desperate, when, after the Weapons we began the Fight with are wrested from us, we snatch up any thing that comes next to hand to throw at our Adversary. This Obstinacy does not well become us: In all our Debates our aim should be to find out the truth, and not to triumph over our Antagonist. All sober Christians, especially where the Peace of the Church is concerned, should always strive to bring the Controversie to an happy issue, and composure; and not seek for Pretences to widen the breach. And then we might all join in Praising and Glorifying of God; and be restored again to that blessed estate they were in, at the first Preaching of the Gospel, when *the Multitude of them that believed were of one Heart, and of one Soul; and continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine, and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and in Prayers.* These few Considerations I have now mentioned might be something useful to the procurement of such a Holy and Heavenly

Acts 4. 32.
Ch. 2. 42.

ly *Peace* in all *Christian Societies* throughout the *World*.

And if we were but careful never to be byassed by *Passion* or *Interest* ; if our greatest *Zeal* and *Concern* were placed upon the more *Weighty* and *Substantial* matters of *Religion* ; if we would seriously consider, how grievous a *Sin* it is to *Separate* from a Church without any just cause ; and if we were disposed to *Peace*, and *willing* to have our *Doubts* and *Scruples* satisfied ; I think most of the *Prejudices* against the Church of *England* might be easily removed ; and we might all joyn in the same *Communion*, to the *Glory* of God, and the *Joy* and *Comfort* of all good *Protestants*, and the *Confusion* of those that design to swallow us up, and have no other hopes of prevailing, but by the help of those *Differences*, which for that end, they have a long time most studiously fomented amongst us. Let not our unreasonable *Fears* and groundless *Jealousies* encourage their Attempts with too great a probability of *Success*. It would be a sad addition to our *Miseries*, if the *Guilt* and *Shame* of them too might be laid to our *Charge*. With what remorse should we reflect upon it, (when the heat of our *Passion* was over) if the *Protestant* Profession should be farther endangered, and the Agents of *Rome* get greater *Advantages* dayly, by those *Distractions* which have been secretly managed by them, but openly carried on and maintained by our selves ! With what face should we look to see our *Enemies*, not only triumphing over us, but mocking and deriding us, for being so far imposed upon by their cunning, as to be made the immediate instruments of our own ruin ! But God Almighty, in his wise and gracious *Providence*, so confound all their *Devices*, that tend to the subversion of the truth ; and so *Unite* and *Compose* our *Differences*, that hereafter we may have no just occasion to fear either their *Treachery*, or their *Force*. This is a *Petition*, I am

sure, in which no good Christian can refuse to joyn; and if we do heartily desire this, let us do what we can to promote it; if our Prayer be not unsincere and hypocritical, we shall make use of our best endeavours to obtain the thing we have prayed for. And now if our *Union* be thus desirable and necessary, what should hinder but that at last we might be all most happily united under the Discipline and Government of the Church of *England*? A Church that is already Framed and Constituted; that has the Countenance and Establishment of the Laws; that has been Protected by a Succession of Wise and Pious Princes; that was Defended unto Death by our late Martyred Sovereign; that was Restored by His Majesty that now is, and has been ever since so graciously Cherished by him, as if the Care of it were a Quality inherent and hereditary to the Crown. A Church that was Reformed by full and sufficient Authority, upon mature and serious Deliberation; with a perfect submission to the Rule of holy Scripture, and a due regard to the example of the most Primitive times. A Church that has constantly rejected all the Errours and Corruptions of *Rome*; that admits of neither their Infallibility, nor Supremacy; that allows no Purgatory, nor Indulgences, no adoration of Reliques, and Images, no Praying to Saints nor Angels; that does not think that God can be pleased with idle Pilgrimages, or a forced Celibacy, or any set number of *Ave's* and *Pater-noster's*, or other formal Devotions exactly computed upon a string of Beads, and muttered over in an unknown Tongue; that does not rob the Laity of half the Communion, nor teach them that strange and contradictory Doctrine, that the Elements are Transubstantiated into the real Body and Blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper; that does not only constantly deny these, and many more absurd and erroneous Opinions of the *Papists*, but has always sent forth as stout and able Champions to oppose them,

as any the Christian World affords. A Church whose Doctrine is confessed to be Orthodox by the generality of our Dissenting Brethren, and whose Discipline and Order of external Worship has nothing in it repugnant to any Law of God. And what imaginable ground can there then be to justify a *Separation* from such a Church? Certainly the use of a few Indifferent things, appointed only for Order's sake, will not be enough to do it. These are not forbidden, and therefore cannot be Sinful in themselves; and where God has not Forbidden, our Superiours may Command; and in all such cases we are bound to Obey.

Some indeed there are that will not be satisfied with this. They tell us, that it is not sufficient that a thing be not *Forbidden*, but that it must be *Commanded*, or else it cannot be used in the Worship of God without Sin. But if this Opinion be true, I must confess that then it is Unlawful to hold Communion not only with ours, but with any Church that is, or ever was in the World; for I do not believe that One can be found amongst them All, that has not required the use of some Indifferent thing that was not *Commanded*. Our Dissenting Brethren themselves will allow, that the Time and Place of Religious Assemblies may be prescribed by Authority. And if these necessary Circumstances may be thus Determined, though they be not *Commanded* by God; then it will be as Lawful to prescribe what particular Gestures and Habits shall be there used. For these are things of the same Nature; Circumstances as necessary as Time and Place; and if we have any respect to the Decent and Reverent performance of the Service of God, they may be as necessary to be determined too. However it must be acknowledged, that some things that are not *Commanded* may be Lawfully Enjoyed and Submitted to; and if some, then all that are of the same Indifferent nature; unless there can be some sufficient

sufficient reason assigned why some should be excepted, and some not; which will be very difficult where the Nature of the things is the same. And in our present case, it will be hard in the general to conceive, how the Command of a Lawful Power should make that Unlawful which was not *Forbidden*, and by consequence was Lawful before.

But if it should be still insisted on, that nothing must be *Commanded* that God has not *Commanded*; they that are of this Perswasion, should be very certain that they have clear proof out of the Scriptures for it, before they undertake to *Forbid* that which God has not *Forbidden*; or else they stand condemned by their own Principle.

Now the Arguments they bring for this out of the New Testament are very few: And those very obscure, and no way applicable to the matter in hand, without being mightily strained: Those out of the Old Testament are not many; that which has been chiefly urged, and seems indeed the most pertinent and material, is this: The whole *Levitical* Service was particularly prescribed by God himself, and *Moses* was strictly charged to make the Tabernacle, and all the Utensils that belonged unto it, *After the pattern that was shewed him in the Mount.* And *Moses* verily was faithful in all his House as a Servant; and so is *Christ* as a Son over his own House; that is, the Church: Therefore as *Moses* laid down all the particular Rules, to be observed in the Worship of God, under the Legal Dispensation, so has *Christ* under the Evangelical; and it is as dangerous to add, as it is to detract from these written Rules; we may no more do what is not *Commanded*, than what is *Forbidden*. This I take to be the main Argument that is brought against us in the present Controversie; and if this can be Answered, all the rest will be but of little Force.

Therefore to give what satisfaction I can to this, I say first, that throughout the whole Epistle to the *Hebrews*, where

Exod. 25. 40.
Heb. 3. 5, 6.

where *Moses* and *Christ*, or the Law and the Gospel are compared; the scope of the Apostle is to shew the exact Correspondence there was betwixt the Type and the Antitype; and not that our Saviour had as particularly prescribed the Order of external Worship, as *Moses* by Gods appointment had done. For it is certain he did not; to give but one instance of very many: The manner of Celebrating the Passover, how it should be Killed, and how it should be Eaten, is set down with every minute Circumstance: But the Institution of the Supper of our Lord is not so delivered unto us: We have only a short Narrative, with a general Command superadded; *Do this in remembrance of me.* And when St. Paul repeats it again, he does it without any mention of the Posture of Receiving. The Gospel, which teaches us a more Spiritual way of Serving God, is not so particular in the Circumstantial of Worship as the Law was; and we must not affirm that it is, because we would have it so. We cannot prove that Christ has actually done this, because we imagine that he should have done it. It would be better argued if we should say, The Gospel has not expressly determined these things, as the Law did; therefore they are left to the prudent determination of *Those that have the Rule over us*, to whom we are Commanded to be Obedient and submit our selves; that the Episcopal Power may be equivalent to the Sacerdotal; and the Service of God as regularly Administred in the Church; as it was in the Temple.

Besides, it was not a Sin, even under the Law, to ordain and observe some things, relating to the Worship of God, that were not written. And these could not be esteemed additions to the Word, if they were not imposed as Divine Precepts, but as Prudent Constitutions, appointed only for the more Orderly management

ment of the external Offices of Religion. But that any thing should be Unlawful, merely because it is not *Commanded*, is a Doctrine; I think, that was never heard of among Jews or Christians, till very lately. God had *Commanded* the setting up of a Tabernacle, and most punctually described how it should be made: We have been told: that there was not to be one *Pin* about it, for which there was not some special Direction. And

See 2 Sam. 17. God never *spake a word concerning building of an House*;
 1 Chron. 17. yet this notwithstanding, *David*, without any *Command*, had it in his thoughts to build one; and *Nathan* in his private judgment approved of the design; and God himself, though he suspended the execution of it for some time, commended him for it, and rewarded

2 Chron. 6. 3. his Pious Intentions, with a promise of *building him* another kind of *House*, by confirming the settlement of the Crown in his Family. Which is proof enough that every thing then that was not *Commanded*, was not therefore Sinful. The ancient Church of the Jews were so fully satisfied in this, that they made no Scruple of ordering divers things, for which they could not find a *Command*. The Feast of the Dedication is a known and pregnant Instance; it was of modern and humane Institution, and yet our Saviour vouchsafed to be present at it. Some things they a little altered, and added others, at the Passover; as their eating of it not Standing, but Sitting; or Lying at the Table; and their Singing a Paschal Hymn after it; which with some other like Usages, were observed by our blessed Lord, and his Disciples; and it can be no less than Blasphemy then to conceive, that there could be any thing that was Sinful in them. The whole matter may be concluded thus: If it were not Sinful under the Law, where the external Form of Divine Worship was particularly specified, to admit of certain Usages that were not *Com-*
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manded, then much less is it Sinful to do so now under the Gospel, where the external Form is not so specified ; where we have little more than such general Rules as these, to be respectively applied by Superiors and Inferiors : *Let all things be done Decently, and in Order* : I Cor. 14. 40.
Obey them that have the Rule over you : Where no Law is, Heb. 13. 17.
there is no transgression. Rom. 4. 15.

I have been something the longer in considering this Argument, because the whole debate must issue here ; which way soever this be decided, the Controversie is at an end. If our Church require any thing of us that is Unlawful, we are bound to *Separate* from her ; if she do not, we are strictly ingaged to Communicate with her. They therefore that Divide, should first shew that she enjoyns something Unlawful. But that never was, and I verily believe never can be made appear. For we are told, in the Person of *St. Paul*, that *All things are Lawful* ; which must of necessity be understood of things I Cor. 6. 12.
that are not *Forbidden* : And then since it cannot be 10. 23.
charged upon our Church, that she Commands any thing that is *Forbidden* ; it must be granted, that she Commands nothing, but what the Apostle has declared to be *Lawful*. What Reason then can be pretended, why we should rend and tear her very Bowels ? Why should we run so headily into opposite Parties and Factions ? Why should we hazard the *Protestant* Cause upon a number of little disunited Independent Interests, that are as much at Difference one with another, as they all are with us ? What should make us so timorous in this, when we are so daring in some other cases ? Why should we be afraid to joyn in Communion with a Reformed Church, whose Doctrine is Orthodox, whose Rites are Innocent, whose Government is Apostolical ? A man would wonder truly what could be pleaded in defence of a Separation, when none of these can be justly accused. And yet there are

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certain Objections brought against us, which those that withdraw would fain perswade us to think sufficient to justify their Departure. To some of the chief of these I shall now endeavour to give what satisfaction I can.

Our Dissenting Brethren therefore are wont to plead ; That there is a *Liturgy*, or Set *Form* of Publick Worship prescribed ; That there are certain *Ceremonies* enjoined ; That the use of these Controverted things gives great *Scandal* to the weak ; That they cannot Safely joyn in our *mixed Communion* ; That they leave our Assemblies for the sake of *greater Edification*, which they can find elsewhere : And for these Reasons they think they are necessitated to depart from ours, and set up Churches to themselves, according to the best Models that every one is able to draw. This is certainly a very dangerous adventure ; and can never be justified by such Arguments, as are produced ; which might be all easily answered upon the general Principle I have already mentioned ; That none of the things against which the exceptions are made are Unlawful ; and therefore they cannot make our Communion Unlawful ; and if that be not Unlawful, it must be Unlawful to divide from it. This might be Reply enough to the most, if not all the Objections that are, or can be brought. But because it may be thought more satisfactory by some, I shall give a particular, though very short, Answer to those I have now proposed.

The First and Great thing that is objected against our Church, is prescribing a *Liturgy*, or Set *Form* of Prayers to be constantly used in Publick Worship. This is that which has raised a great many Clamours ; Peoples minds have been extreamly incensed and exasperated against it ; it has been cryed out upon as *Idolatrous*, *Popish*, *Superstitious*, and I know not how many hard Names it is has been called. But I am glad to find the
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temper of our Dissenting Brethren altered so much for the better : We do not now so often hear those bitter exclamations of *Rome* and *Babylon*, *Baal* and *Dagon* : The *Common Prayer* is not esteemed such an abominable thing, as some ignorant and heady Zealots were wont to count it. Among those that have but too openly favoured the *Separation* the more considerable part, both for Number and Sobriety, do not only allow that a *Form* is Lawful, but will freely acknowledge that ours is so; and therefore they will admit of *Occasional*, and if so, I cannot see what can withhold them from a full and constant Communion with us. Certainly that which is Lawful once or twice, must be Lawful always. However we may take some delight to see the old Heats in any measure abated, and that the least advances are made towards Peace. God grant that this Concession may prove a step to a happy and perfect Reconciliation. And so I hope it may; for our Brethren cannot be any longer offended with those Forms in which they do sometimes join themselves. Nay those that have not yet proceeded so far, but are still afraid of being Defiled in our way of Worship, cannot have any colour to Condemn it for being a *Form*. The Jews had *Forms* in their Publick Assemblies, which this notwithstanding were duly frequented by our blessed Saviour : He delivered a *Form* himself, in his Sermon on the Mount, and taught the same again to his Disciples afterwards, and Commanded them to use it : Some *Forms* were received very early among the Ancient Christians; who have been followed in this by all the *Protestant Churches*; But the Lawfulness of them was never called in question heretofore : For how could it, since they are no where Forbidden ? Or if a Command be thought requisite to make them Lawful, the other way is no more Commanded than this; and therefore upon that Principle they must be both equally Lawful, or Unlawful :

Matth. 6. 9. &c.

Luke 11. 2.

So that if any Prayer be Lawful, a *Form* must be confessed to be so. The Arguments in this case are so Convincing, that there are few now but that will readily agree that a *Form* may be Lawful in it self; but then they think it ought not to be Imposed, because of some Inconveniences which they conceive, do attend it. And they are principally these Two; the One, that there may be some particular Emergencies which cannot be provided for by a *Set Form*. The Other, that it is an hinderance to the *Spirit* of Prayer. The first of these has very little difficulty in it. The ordinary wants and necessities of Christians are always the same, and we may Petition to have them supplied in the same Words; and for other things, it may generally be foreseen that they may happen sometimes; and suitable *Forms* may be composed to be used upon such Occasions: Where these cannot be fitly applied, peculiar Offices may be set forth; as has been usual in such cases: Where the exigency is great, and will not admit of so much delay as is necessary for that, the Minister is at Liberty to use his own Conceptions. But this cannot be urged for the Exclusion of a *Liturgy*. It were very unreasonable to deprive the Church of known and approved *Forms*, and leave her to the mercy of extemporary Effusions only, for the sake of a few Contingencies, which may happen but very rarely, if at all, in a whole Age.

The other thing that is alledged would be more considerable, if it were really true, That *Forms* did indeed hinder the *Spirit* of Prayer. But this they do not: For it is a gross and carnal Mistake to imagine that the *Spirit* of Prayer can consist in a readiness of Expression, and a natural or acquired volubility of Tongue; Arts and Accomplishments whereof many Wicked men have been great Masters; and wherein as many Good ones may be very deficient. The *Spirit* of Prayer must be acknowledged

ledged to be nothing else but an inward good and pious Disposition of the Soul, wrought in us by the Grace of God; an unfeigned Humility and Abhorrence of our selves, when we confess our Sins, and beg for Pardon; an affectionate Sense of our Wants, when we ask for all things necessary, both for this and the other Life; an holy exultation of Mind, when we offer up our Praises and Thanks for the Blessings we have received; a full Resignation of our Concerns to God's disposal, and a Dependance upon his Promises for the granting our Requests, when we have made our Addresses unto him. These are the great Indications of the true *Spirit* of Prayer; and these are so far from being *Hindered*, that they may be very much Helped, and Advantaged by a *Form*. A man questionless may be more seriously Affected, in all these respects, and say *Amen* more heartily to a *Form* of sound Words which he hath known, and considered before, than he can to some uncertain Expressions which he never heard, nor thought on; and possibly may not so well understand, nor be satisfied in, when he hears them. The perplexity and doubtfulness of Thoughts, which must often arise, when we would join in Prayers we are unacquainted with, is directly Opposite to that Faith and Assurance with which we should Pray; and can scarce be prevented but by a well digested and studied *Form*; that may be Weighed, and soberly Assented to, by those that are required to join in it.

But some think that it may be manifest from *Experience*, that *Forms* are a *hinderance* to the very inward *Spirit* of Devotion. They have found their Affections very cold and flat, at our usual stated *Forms* of Prayer; but when they hear a man Pray without a *Form*, they are mightily ravished, and almost transported; and this dif-

difference of Temper they observe in themselves, has prevailed with many, of the more undiscerning sort especially, to forsake our Communion. But it is always very dangerous to judge of things not by our Understandings, but by the various impulses and motions of our Affections. When we have Scripture and Reason on our side, we cannot be Deceived; but when we Determine, as we are swayed by the present byass of our Passions; these may be Charmed, or Raised, or Flattened, by several sorts of *Spirits*; and quickly betray us into strong Delusions. Therefore if any one should be tempted, as some have been; to leave the Church on this Account, that he thinks he may be more *affected* in another Place; before he goes, I would desire him to consider what it is that does thus *Affect* him: If it be the Matter and Substance of the Prayer, I suppose that may be usually the same, at least as good in our ordinary Offices, as it is in their unpremeditated Petitions; and so it will not be necessary to make a *Separation* for this: If it be only the chiming and harmony of the Words he is taken with, this is no more but a kind of sensitive Delight; and to apply the Prophet's Expressions here, it is but like a *very lovely Song of one that hath a pleasant Voice, and can play well on an Instrument*: This will by no means excuse our departing from the Publick Assemblies; this would be in effect to say, that we may make Divisions in the Church of God, to gratifie our own private, and it may be mistaken Fancies. But if any one hath left us for a time upon this Pretence, and made some Trial of both ways, then I would desire him strictly to examine his own Conscience, whether he have not often been as Dull and Indifferent at a Conceived Prayer, as ever he was at the Service of the Church: And then on the other side, let him consider, whether he do not believe that very
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Ezek. 33. 32.

many may be as serious and devout at the Common Prayer, as ever he was at any in the other way he is pleased to prefer: And after he has thus inquired, if he see Reason to acknowledge both, as doubtless he will, then the Scales will be even at the least: *Experience* will shew, that men may be Fervent and Affectionate with a *Form*, and Cold and Inattentive without one. And therefore when we are heavy, listless, and unaffected at a Prayer by a *Form*; this Defect cannot proceed from the Manner of the Devotion, but from the Indisposition of the Person that uses it. And when we *Separate* upon this occasion, we are guilty of a double Iniquity, in Dividing the Church without sufficient Cause; and charging our own Formality upon a good and wholesome Constitution.

My intended brevity will not permit me to give a particular Answer to all the Exceptions that have been taken at our *Liturgy*; only in the general I say; I known nothing in it, that can be pretended to be Sinful in it self. The most that is urged are some supposed Inconveniences; which if we should grant to be real, they cannot make our Communion Unlawful; and then as I have often intimated, it must be a Sin to *Separate* from it; and we may not commit a Sin to decline an Inconvenience: This would be to *do evil that good may come* of it. They that are willing to improve every slight Exception into a Cause of *Separation*, should beware of this. The Question is not, whether there be not any thing in the Order of our Divine Service which a man could wish to be altered? For that can never be expected under any Constitution. The main Inquiry is this, whether any thing Unlawful be appointed to be used, which will make an Alteration not only desirable, but necessary? And whether we are bound to withdraw till such alteration be made? Which has never

ver been proved: Men generally forbear our Publick Worship, without ever examining into it, upon no other ground but because they prefer their own Arbitrary way before it. Which I do not admire; but this is very strange and unreasonable, that they should take such a disgust at our *Liturgy*, and fly away from it, as if it were *Popish* and *Antichristian*, when they never have so much as read it; at least considered it, as they ought. And here I shall take the Confidence to affirm that the *Liturgy*, some abhor so much, was made and reviewed with that Prudence and Moderation that Care and Circumspection, that there is not any thing now extant in that kind, that has been compos'd with greater Wisdom, and Piety. If we should take the liberty to compare it with the performances in the other way; (not to mention the many undecent, incoherent, irreverent expressions, to say no worse, that might be collected) let any Prayer made occasionally and *extempore* by the ablest and most cautious of those that magnifie that way, and despise ours, be taken exactly in writing, and published to the World; and I am very confident, that one man, without any great pains, may find more things really exceptionable, in that single Prayer, in a short time, than the several Parties of Dissenters, with all the diligence they have hitherto used, have been able to discover in the whole Service of our Church in more than a hundred years. And yet some of our Brethren, that seek industriously for Scruples in the Common Prayer, will readily join in other sudden conceived Prayers, without any Scruple; when they cannot tell but that there may be some dangerous Heresie in every Sentence, and some great Indecencies and Absurdities in every Word. This is such partiality, and unequal dealing, as cannot be easily excus'd.

But if they should allow of the *Forms* of Prayer in
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our *Liturgy*, there are certain *Ceremonies* enjoyn'd, which they think give them occasion enough to depart from our Communion. A man that were unacquainted with the true State of our case, that should stand by and only hear the bitter Cries and Invectives that have been made against *Ceremonies*, would be ready to imagine, that sure our Church was nothing else almost but *Ceremonies*. But he would be mightily surprized, when upon inquiry he should find, that these *Ceremonies* which had occasioned all this noise, should be no more than Three; the *Surplice*, the *Cross* after Baptism, and *Kneeling* at the Sacrament. He would be amazed to think that these should be the things, about which so many massy Books had been written! So great discords and animosities rais'd! Such a flourishing Church once quite destroyed, and now most miserably divided, after it had been so happily restored! And his wonder must be increased, when he should perceive that of these Three, there was but One, and no more, in which the People were any way concerned. The *Cross* and the *Surplice* are to be used only by the Minister; and if his Conscience be satisfied, no mans else need to be disturb'd about them. To *kneel* at the Lord's Supper all indeed are commanded; but supposing this to be Unlawful, it could hinder us only from partaking in that Ordinance, and not in the rest. But of that farther by and by.

In the meantime, I do not understand but that some *Ceremonies*, and particular Determinations of Circumstances are absolutely necessary in the Worship of God; since it cannot be performed without them; they that will have no *Ceremonies*, can have no external Worship. This I think will not be denied. But the *Ceremonies* that are appointed in our Church, are thought by some to be *significant*, *superstitious*, and breaches of our Christian *Liberty*; and therefore not to be indured. These

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are the great Objections against the few Ceremonies, that are in use among us; and these I shall briefly Consider.

First, we are told our Ceremonies are significant: And why may not a significant Ceremony be Lawful? Are not Kneeling, and lifting up the Eyes and Hands to Heaven significations of the Reverence we owe to the Divine Majesty? Yes: But Ceremonies that signify something naturally may be permitted; but not those that signify by institution. There should be some solid reason, or some plain Scripture Authority, brought to make this difference good: And here it is pleaded that every significant Ceremony is a Sacrament; and it is downright Popery to make more Sacraments, than God has made. This I confess were very material, if it could be proved. But we acknowledge nothing to be a Sacrament, but what is *An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.* Now if this be a true Definition, as it is owned by us, and must be acknowledged by our Dissenting Brethren that talk so much of their approving the Doctrine of our Church; then our Ceremonies, though they should be never so significant, cannot be Sacraments, because they want so many Necessary and Essential conditions that are required to make a Sacrament. They are not of Divine Ordination and Appointment, they are of no efficacy to confer any Grace, neither are they any Pledges, and Assurances of it. But suppose we should grant every significant Ceremony to be a Sacrament; for it is neither pleasant nor profitable to quarrel about Words: There is but one of the Three Ceremonies, and that is the Cross at Baptism, that can be pretended to be significant; and that indeed is made, *In token that the Party newly Baptized shall not hereafter*
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Common
Prayer in the
Catech.

Ibid. in Pub-
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be ashamed to confess the Faith of Christ Crucified, &c. But this sign of the Cross was very anciently, if not always, used at Baptism, and upon several other occasions, by the Primitive Christians, in defiance of all sorts of Infidels, and as we do it, in token that they were not ashamed of a Crucified Saviour. Our Church in this does but follow the example of the Purest and Holiest Professors of the Gospel that ever were; and that but at a distance too, in doing that but once, which they repeated often. And this can scarce be called a *significant Ceremony*. It is not appointed to Represent any thing unto us, but only to remind us of a Duty we are bound to do. Like the *Altar* that was built by the Children of *Reuben*, and *Gad*, and the half Tribe of *Manasseh*, Not for burnt-offering, nor for sacrifice; but *Josh. 22. 26.* that it might be a Witness. And if any one should think the *Surplice* were ordered to be worn to denote the innocency of Life, that does more especially become those that are particularly devoted to the Service of God; it is more than our Church has declared; but yet no man were to be blamed, that should take occasion from hence, to let his thoughts expatiate into a pious and seasonable Meditation, and consider how incongruous it would be, to have his inward parts full of filthiness and corruption, when his out-side was covered with a clean white Linnen Garment. The Sum is, every *significant Ceremony* is not a *Sacrament*; and none of ours can be properly said to be *significant*, representing, *symbolical*; but only *Commemorating*, or if any man please to call them so, *Professing signs*.

But though they cannot be proved to be *Sacraments*, yet they may be *Superstitious*, and that is Objection enough against them. And I confess that they may be *Superstitious*; but not in themselves, for so they are perfectly Indifferent; but according to the Opinion or

Conceit of those that use them, or use them not. There may be *Superstition* in the Observing of these, and there may be as much in the Forbearing. *Superstition* is nothing but a groundless Fancy attended sometimes with an anxious Fear, and sometimes with a sordid Hope, that God is pleased or displeased with the bare performance or forbearance of what he hath neither Commanded nor Forbidden. He therefore that thinks he offends God in doing of that he has not Forbidden; and he that imagines he shall please him, by the observing of what he has not Commanded, are both in some degree, and it may be equally, *Superstitious*. And then the *Superstition* that is exercised about the Observation of these *Ceremonies* must lie on the part of our Dissenting Brethren, who think they should Sin in keeping them, though they generally confess they are not Forbidden? and not ours, who declare them to be Indifferent, and no otherwise acceptable unto God, but as they are the effects of Obedience to our Superiours, and necessary to the preservation of Discipline and Order in the Church.

But it is farther urged by some, that these *Ceremonies* are a *Breach* of our Christian Liberty. I need not enter upon a Discourse of this; but as far as it concerns the matter in hand, I say; That the being freed from the *Ceremonial Law*, is a part, though not the greatest part of *Christian Liberty*; but then it is not so much our being freed from observing it, as from the Necessity of observing it. The Apostles and first Christians did voluntarily observe it for some time upon Prudential Considerations; and imposed some things, as the *abstaining from Blood, and from things strangled*; and yet they were *Free*, because whatever they did of this Nature, they did it not with an Opinion of any Necessary obligation that lay upon them to do it, but upon other Motives;

rives; most commonly out of condescension to the weakness of the Jewish Converts. And if some *Judaical Rites*, might not only be observed, but imposed; then there can be no reason why a few Indifferent *Ceremonies* may not be appointed now, without any intrenchment upon the *Liberty* which Christ has purchased for us. Such things cannot be an infringement of that, but only when they are supposed to be either Unlawful or Necessary by Divine Command.

Kneeling at the Sacrament, which is the *Ceremony* that is wont to be the most scrupled, is as little liable to the *Objections*, that I have now answered, as either of the other. It would be very uncharitable and unjust, to say, as some have done; that it is an Act of Worship to the outward Elements; when the Church has declared this to be *Idoltry*, to be *abhorred of all Faithful Christians*. If it should be said that we ought to receive in the same posture, that they received at the first Institution: We cannot certainly tell, what that was: If it were that which is most probably conjectured, it is never used: It is wholly laid aside by those that argue the most Zealously for it. But sure if the particular Gesture had been so absolutely necessary, as some do imagine, there would have been some plain and express mention of it somewhere in the Scripture; which there is not, as I have noted before. And then it must be very unwarrantable in those, that Separate from our Church, because they will not receive in that reverent manner which She has prescribed. If there had been nothing enjoined in this matter, a man upon a serious apprehension of the infinite mercies of God, through the merits and mediation of his Blessed Saviour, could scarce have forbore falling upon his Knees, when he came to partake of the Sacrament of his most precious Body and Blood. The commemoration of the Death and

Rubr. after
the Commu-
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Passion of the Son of God, by which he was Redeemed, would strike him, almost *carually*, into the humblest posture of Adoration. But if any reverence be granted to be due at such a time, I am sure *sitting* at the Table, is a very unfit posture to express it. Or if any man should like it better than that which is required with us; yet to make this an occasion of departing from our Communion, would argue but too little value for the Peace of the Church.

But some there are, who though they be convinced of the Lawfulness of all these Rites and Usages, and for their own particular, could joyn with us well enough; yet they dare not do it, for fear of giving *Scandal* and Offence to those that are not satisfied in these things. This matter of *Scandal* has been so vehemently pleaded sometimes, as if it were the only thing to be regarded in all Church Constitutions; and that they were to be immediately disused, whatever Authority enjoined them, as soon as any should be offended at them. This puts all external Order in Christian Assemblies into a very tottering condition, ready to be presently overturned, by every little Scruple, that may chance to arise. But for answer to this, we must observe: That they are the Weak and Ignorant that take Offence: That their doubts and scruples are not to be nourished and commended, but only born with for a time; That they are bound to take all due Care, and convenient Opportunity of Instruction, that they may be fully satisfied; and that it is in things meerly Indifferent, such as *Meats* and *Drinks*, where we are obliged to any compliance, for the avoiding of *Scandal*. These things thus briefly premised, let it be considered; whether they who esteem themselves rather more Knowing than others, who seem unwilling to part with their Doubts, and who have entertained some Prejudices against those that would inform

See Rom. 14.

1 Cor. 8.

inform them better, are to be treated like weak Brethren ? And whether we ought to yield to them, where Authority has determined the contrary ; unless we could prove our Obedience as Indifferent as the things scrupled at are supposed to be ? If it should be said, that we ought ; yet at least it cannot be safely done, till it be made appear, that all the weak are of one side. For in our present Case, if there should be as many, as doubtless there are, that would be offended to see the manner of our Publick Worship altered, as there are to see it imposed ; then though the Command of our Superiors should signify nothing, we should yet be up on equal terms, on the account of *Scandal* only ; and as much bound not to *Separate*, as they think they are to *Separate*, by their own Principle. But in a word, no *Scandal* taken at an Indifferent thing, can be so great as the Sin, and Scandal both, of Confusion and Disorder, and Contempt of Authority.

There is another Exception near akin to this : Some have thought they must withdraw from us, because of our *mixt Communions*, and that some, which they judge unworthy Receivers, are admitted to the Lord's Table. This Objection proves nothing but a Supercilious Arrogance, and a great want of Charity in those that make it. What care they may take in their new way of Discipline, I cannot tell ; but our Church has given the Minister a Power of rejecting those that are guilty of any known and scandalous Sin. And this is as much as can be done ; the open Sinner may be excluded, but the close Hypocrite will escape the narrowest search, that humane Industry can make. But if any *notorious evil Livers* should be admitted through the ignorance, inadvertency, or negligence of the Minister ; their Unworthiness cannot defile those that Communicate with them. It is generally thought that the Cursed

See Rubr. after the Communion.

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Traytor, *Judas* did partake of the Holy Supper, when it was first instituted by our Lord, God be praised. I have not heard, that amongst us, the abuses of this Ordinance did ever arise to that Degree that they were at among the *Corinthians*; when at the very
 1 Cor. II. 21. time of receiving, *one was Hungry, and another Drunken.* And yet the Apostle does not Command them to forsake the *Communion* of that Church, where these Scandalous Enormities were committed. Every man is charged to *Examine himself*, and not another, before he presume
 Ver. 28. to eat of that *Bread*, and drink of that *Cup*. And it would be very well, if all men would hearken to this holy and pious Admonition; for he that inquires seriously into his own Sins, will find great cause to be Humble and Penitent, and so may become a worthy Communicant: But he that is curious to pry into the miscarriages of other men, will be apt to be vain, proud, self-conceited, and censorious; which will make him as unfit for the Table of the Lord, as any of those Faults which he so scornfully condemns in his Neighbour, that he esteems himself, and the Ordinances of God polluted by his Company.

But if none of these Pleas, I have mentioned, should be sufficient; many think they may leave our Assemblies only for the sake of *greater Edification*, which they can find elsewhere. This I believe prevails with great numbers, of the more ignorant especially, to depart from us. And I would to God they might obtain what they say they depart for; and that they were indeed more *Edified*, and did grow in Grace, under what Ministry soever it be. But alas! This talk of *greater Edification* is many times meer wantonness, and instability of humour; and too often rather in Fancy, than Effect. Men conceit that they are better *Edified*, not when they are more fully instructed in any weighty point

point of Faith; or more perfectly informed in some necessary Duty; or more efficaciously moved to the practice of what they Know; but when they are more gratified, and pleased, at the hearing of a Sermon, or the like. This is nothing but one sort of those *itching Ears*, the Apostle speaks of. And they that are troubled with this disease, instead of being *Edified*, as they pretend, are commonly the most ignorant of all; and as blameable as any in their ordinary Conversation. I wish we had not too many examples of the truth of this. For besides that, it is great odds but that they make an unwise choice in the Teacher they set up to themselves at last; they likewise provoke God to leave them to the vanity of their own Minds, when they depend rather on the supposed abilities of a man, than the blessed influences of the holy Spirit; and look more at *Paul that plants*, and *Apollos that waters*, than at *God that gives the increase*. 2 Tim. 4. 3.

If we have all things necessary to the building us up in our most holy Faith, in the Communion of the Church; it will be but a poor excuse for our Dividing from it, that we hoped to be better *Edified*; when we had no incouragement at all to hope it, as long as we continued in the state of *Separation*, upon this pretence. For it is the blessing of God alone, and not any mans skill in dispensing them, that can make the Word and Ordinances any way beneficial unto us. With the help of his Grace, those means of Instruction, which we sometimes undervalue the most, may be profitable to our Salvation: Without it our Ears may be tickled, and our Fancies pleasantly entertained for the time; but we cannot be truly *Edified* by the most fluent and popular Tongue, nor the most melting and pathetical Expressions in the World.

I have briefly examined the chief Objections that are

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brought against the established Order, and Constitution of our Church; and do not find that any, or all of them together, are of force enough to move an unprejudiced Person to forsake her Communion. It may not be done upon the account of *Liturgy*, *Ceremonies*, *Scandal*, *mixed Communion*, or out of hopes of *greater Edification*. I might have easily enlarged upon all these particulars; but the compass of my present Design would not allow it. And I have some hopes that these and other points in difference, may be handled by others to better advantage, and to the satisfaction of those that are not yet convinced, and to the happy settlement of a lasting *Peace and Union*, among all the Members of this divided Church. God grant that all our indeavours may tend this way; and that the Divine Goodness may make them Successful. If these Papers should chance to fall into the hands of any one of those that have *Separated* from us, I would intreat him not to be Offended at them; but to look upon the Author, as a well-meaning Man, that was willing to throw a little Water upon the common flame, that is like to consume us. They were not written, I am sure with any bitterness of Mind, or Expression; but out of meer pity to see a poor, lamentable, distressed Church, languishing away, and ready to perish by desperate Wounds and Convulsions within her own Bowels. Such sad and Melancholy thoughts, as these apprehensions must needs occasion, could scarce be vented in angry and provoking Language. But some are so tender of the Opinions they have taken up, that, whether true or false, they cannot endure to have them touched: They are impatient of the calmest Opposition; and when you offer any thing to perswade them, though it should be to brotherly Love and Peace among Christians, they suspect you for an Enemy, and think that you
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come to set traps in their way to insnare their Consciences. But I hope this short Discourse will not be countred by any such Prejudice ; but that it may be perused, with the same Impartiality that it was written.

On this presumption, I shall be bold to exhort all those that now Dissent, to a Brotherly *Union* ; upon such motives and arguments, as the Gospel suggests, and make for the Credit and Safety of the *Protestant* Religion. It will be readily acknowledged by every sober and intelligent man, that Peace and Amity, and a good Correspondence betwixt the several Members of which they consist, is the only Beauty, Strength, and Security of all Societies ; and on the contrary, that the nourishing of Animosities, and running into opposite Parties and Factions, does mightily weaken, and by degrees almost unavoidable draw on the Ruin and Dissolution of any Community, whether Civil or Sacred. Concord and Union therefore will be as necessary for the Preservation of the Church, as of the State. It has been known by too sad an Experience, as well in ours, as other Ages, what a pernicious Influence the intestine Broils and Quarrels among Christians have had. They have been the great stumbling Block to Jews, Turks, and Heathens ; and the main hindrance of their Conversion ; they have made some among our selves, to become Doubtful and Sceptical in their Religion ; they have led others into many dangerous Errors, that shake the very Foundations of our Faith ; and some they have tempted to cast off the Natural sense they had of the Deity, and imboldened to an open and professed Atheism.

These are some of the most usual Fruits, which the unhappy Differences in the Church are wont to produce ; over and above the particular Unkindnesses and Uncharitable Feuds, which they commonly beget a-

John 11. 52.

mong Christians of the same Perswasion, as to all substantial and weighty matters of Belief. And it were a thing very desirable in all respects, that these at least should be all firmly United in the same holy Communion. They that have the same Articles of Faith, and hope to meet in the same Heaven, through the Merits of the same Lord, should not be afraid to come into the same Assemblies, and joyn seriously in sending up the same Prayers, and participating of the same Sacraments. Besides the many strict Precepts and other strong Obligations which we have unto this; our Saviour *Died, that he might gather together in One, the Children of God that were scattered abroad.* And should we not then contradict this end of his Death, if we should set those at Strife and Variance, which he intended to *Unite*? Nay, might we not be said, in some sort, to *Crucify the Son of God afresh*; if we should Mangle and Divide any sound and healthful part of that Body, of which he owns himself to be the Head? If indeed our Church did require us to make Profession of any false and erroneous Opinions; if in the external Order and Worship we were enjoined to do any thing contrary to any Divine Command; we are bound in such Instances to withdraw from her: But if her Doctrine be highly approved by most of our Dissenting Brethren; and her Discipline and Service such, as is not any way inconsistent with any Law of God; then we are indispensably engaged to join in Communion with her. For, as has been intimated several times, and it cannot be inculcated too often, nothing but the Unlawfulness of Communicating can make a *Separation* Lawful.

But if it be Resolved, that the Church of *England* must be forsaken, notwithstanding that neither her Doctrine nor Discipline can be justly condemned; it would yet be convenient to bethink our selves, what might

might be the most advisable to be done, after we had left it. Whether we should set up another way of Administration in the room of it : Or whether every one should have the Liberty of following that, which he fancied the best. If we are for the setting up another way ; it must be either *Presbytery*, or *Independency* : For if there should be any other new Forms of Government, they are not yet of Reputation enough to be put in Competition with these two great Pretenders to Divine Right. And *Presbytery*, which had once the fairest hopes of establishing it self, is now grown weak and inconsiderable, in comparison of what it was ; and those few, which would still be thought of that Perswasion, are manifestly departed from their own Principles, and are fain to support themselves by Gathered Assemblies, which they were not wont to allow. *Independency* therefore seems at this time to be the prevailing way ; but their manner of Gathering Members, and Associating themselves into particular Congregations, their *Holy Band*, *special Agreement*, or *Covenant*, which they make Essential to the Constituting of a Church, are things which have not the least foundation in the holy Scriptures ; neither were they ever Countenanced by the Practice of any Orthodox Christians in former Ages. But put the case, we should admit of either of these Forms of Discipline and Government, we should be as far, if not farther, from being *United* than we are now. For they have both been known to have been very rigorous Imposers, wherever they have had the Power of Commanding ; and as they have sometimes been, so they would soon again become more odious to the several Subdivisions of Dissenters, than *Episcopacy* it self. And this being a thing so easily foreseen, we are not now urged with the Necessity of setting up either of these. The great Expedient, that has been proposed of late,

late, is to indulge a Liberty of choosing what Church, and what way of Worship any man pleases ; that is, to grant a publick *Toleration* of divers Religions. But this, though it might gratifie the present humor of some part of the Nation, and serve some mens Occasions better than any Establishment, would be quickly disliked by most of those that now contend so Zealously for it. For there must needs be a constant Emulation and Struggling betwixt the several *Tolerated* Parties, which would give a continual Disturbance ; and as soon as any of them began to grow Numerous and Powerful, and had any Hopes of succeeding, they would presently imagine it very necessary to impose their own Discipline upon all the rest ; and this probably might soon put an end to the so much desired and magnified way of *Toleration*. Or if we could suppose them contented to allow the same Freedom to others which they enjoyed themselves, yt it could not possibly be avoided, but that this indulgence must strangely multiply our Divisions ; while some Members of their *Separate* Churches would take Offence, and withdraw, and make choice of a new Pastor, and incorporate themselves into another new Church, and that after a while, upon the like Pretences, might be split into another, and another, and so on without any stop. And then this would certainly set open the Gate to a Flood of Heresies, and such monstrous and extravagant Opinions, as must be confessed, by the most prejudiced Dissenter, to be of far more dangerous consequence to the cause of Religion than that sober and pious *Liturgy*, and those few indifferent *Rites* which are now enjoyned. This the experience of the Late Times found to be true. The Church of *England* was no sooner overthrown, but some of those that had been the most forward and bu-
 sic to pull her down, when they saw how suddenly the
 swarms

swarms of other Sectaries increased upon them, were forced to acknowledge that the Constitution, which they had destroyed, was a great check and restraint to those Errors, which grew Bold and Licentious under the Liberty they had procured. The Bishops then, who just before had been the common Theme of Popular Obloquy, had some good Words unwillingly dropt upon them, and their Diligence, and Success in suppressing Absurd, Heretical, and many times Blasphemous Doctrines, was allowed some just Commendation. That Government, which they had traduced and rendred as odious as was possible, by all the arts of Defamation that could be used, was found upon Trial to be far more desirable, by some of its greatest Enemies, than that Anarchy and Confusion they had contended for with so much Violence.

But if we cannot be made sufficiently Apprehensive of the dismal Effects, that will almost Naturally follow upon a Publick *Toleration* ; yet methinks we should now be a little Suspicious of it, since we know it is the main Engine the *Papists* have been working with these many years. If there be no Remedy but that our Church must fall, let us not throw it down our selves by methods of their Prescribing ; let us not act as if we were prosecuting the Designs of the Conclave ; and proceed just as if we were governed by the Decrees of the pretended Infallible Chair. We may be ashamed to look so like Tools in the hands of the *Jesuits* ; when we suffer our selves to be guided by those measures which they had taken, and talk and do as they would have us ; as if we were immediately inspired from *Rome*. For we cannot be ignorant, that *Toleration* has been a Device of theirs ; and it would not be any part of our Wisdom to grow unreasonably fond of the Invention of our Enemies ; and think to strengthen the *Protestant* Interest

Interest by those very means, which their Subtilty and Malice had contrived to destroy it.

But if this Consideration should be laid aside; What need can there be otherwise, that we should desire to be Indulged in our departure from a Church, where we may Communicate with a safe Conscience? As we may certainly do in ours; whose greatest Adversaries have not been able; after the most curious Search they could make, to find out one thing in the whole Constitution, which they could positively affirm to be Forbidden; and till that can be made appear, we must still say that it cannot be Unlawful. If the *Imposition* of some Indifferent things be thought a sufficient ground for a *Separation*; (as it is now generally urged, since the proof of their Unlawfulness is despaired of) then we must have *Separated* from the Apostolical Churches, who had some such Usages, as the Holy Kiss, and others, whose Indifferency is acknowledged by their being wholly disused: We must have *Separated* from the first Churches that succeeded them, which had all some Indifferent things enjoined: We must *Separate* at this time from all the Reformed Churches in the World; for there is none of these which does not require the use of such things, as we should judge cause enough to depart from them: Nay, when we have once *Separated* from the Church of *England* upon this account, we must then *Separate* from one another, and every man must be a Church by himself; for it is impossible, that any Society, whether meerly Humane, or Christian, should subsist, without the orderly determination of some Indifferent things. And sure we can never hope to maintain our *Separation* upon such a Principle, as would not only part us from all the Churches that are, or ever were, and tear Christendom into ten thousand pieces; but scarce leaves us so much as the Notion of a Church

Church, and makes Christian Communion absolutely impracticable. Let us not give those of *Rome* the pleasure of seeing that Church, which has always opposed them with the greatest Vigor, and been the constant mark of their Envy, quite Ruined, or extremely Weakned, by a pernicious Mistake, that would Divide and Divide us again and again, and never make any end of Dividing. Let us shew at least that we are well inclined unto Peace, by coming as far as we can; and if there should be any thing that we may possibly suspect to be Unlawful, let not this hinder us from joyning in those other holy Offices, in which we have not any pretence of a Doubt. Let not our groundless Scrupling at a Ceremony, or two, fright us from the whole Worship of God, against which we have not any Exceptions.

And for those that esteem our Communion in all particulars utterly Unlawful, which I suppose are but very few, and I know they have but very slight Arguments for the severe Judgment they pass upon us; if they will meet, let them do it in the most private manner that they can, without any vain Ostentation of their Numbers, which cannot be any Satisfaction to their Consciences, but may make their Adherents overforward and bold, and tend to the creating of Jealousies in the Government. And while they are upon these terms, they cannot reasonably expect any Connivance. They might sooner hope for it from His Majesties wonted and often experienced Clemency; when they shall make it appear, that their Dissent is modest and humble, and such as has no other but a Religious Design in it; than when they assume a high degree of Confidence, and think to extort Indulgencies by Clamors and Discontents, and resolve to Assemble openly in Opposition to a Royal Command, as if it were a piece of Christian Fortitude to outbrave Authority. These are but ill

Methods of courting the Favour of a Prince. But I hope for the future we shall all, upon all Occasions, behave our selves as becomes good Subjects, and sober Christians, and make no Disturbances neither on a Civil nor Ecclesiastical account.

Let it Pity us at last to see the Ghastly Wounds, that are still renewed by the continuance of our Divisions. Let us have some Compassion on a Bleeding Church, that is ready to Faint, and in eminent Danger of being made a prey to her Enemies, by the unnatural Heats and Animosities of those that should Support and Defend her. Why should we leave her thus Desolate and Forlorn, when her present Exigencies require our most Cordial Assistance? If the condition of her Communion were such as God's Laws did not allow, we might forsake her that had forsaken him. But since this cannot be Objected against her; since she exacts no Forbidden thing of us, let us strengthen her Hands by our unanimous Agreement; and since we do not Condemn her Doctrine, let us not Despise her Worship; since the Substantials of Religion are the same, let not the Circumstances of external Order and Discipline be any longer an Occasion of Difference amongst us. And so shall we bring Glory to God, a happy Peace to a Divided Church, a considerable Security to the *Protestant Religion*, and probably Defeat the subtle Practices of *Rome*, which now stands gaping after All; and hopes by our Distractions to repair the losses she has suffered by the Reformation. May the Wisdom of Heaven make all Wicked Purposes unsuccessful; and the Blessed Spirit of Love heal all our Breaches, and prosper the Charitable Endeavours of those that follow after PEACE. *Amen.*

F I N I S.